

IMPERIAL ASSEMBLY UPDATE

If you've been anywhere near Legend of the Five Rings for the past year you're no doubt well aware of The Imperial Gift. This groundbreaking promotion is unlike any other in Legend of the Five Rings history, and there's still one more set to go. 2010 will see the release of Imperial Gift III, the final part of the fully legal, fully free expansion set.

Imperial Gift I was in essence a small teaser of things to come. Players received a nice addition to their Celestial Edition decks at no cost to them. It's pretty tough to say no to free.

The real excitement came with Imperial Gift II. It contained two entirely legal decks, ready to play with new instructional cards. Existing players had been begging for it to recruit new players, and the fans and stores did not wait to snatch them up. The initial mail out of Imperial Gift II (and subsequent requests and conventions such as GenCon) burned



through the set at a fevered pace. And Imperial Gift II wasn't just an easy introduction set: it had some meat! Imperial Gift II cards periodically show up in constructed decks, and we expect more of the same with The Imperial Gift III.

Imperial Gift III features all-new cards, with some surprisingly useful effects. At the time of this writing there are no final names on the cards, but I can give you a little look at what's ahead. Are boxables getting you down? There's a new event that really puts the screws to them. How about all those silly cards with the sake tokens running around... you know what they say about drinking: it can get you hurt.

How about a Dramatic Assassination effect for drunk characters? Ever wanted an event that brings your dead characters back to

the game? It's coming, though naturally there's a twist. Flanked by Nightmares has been a powerhouse for Shadowlands cards, but now the Empire can turn the tables with what is essentially a reverse Flanked. Monks get their own Kata, a new fate card lets you search for holdings, recursion appears for political tactics, a new spell brings samurai and shugenja together, and new ways to make gold can be found in Imperial Gift III as well.

We would be remiss if we didn't mention Bryan Reese's new personal favorite card, "Sword." Unfortunately you won't ever see it with that title and the current art... but be sure to ask him about it at conventions.

Imperial Gift III appears later in 2010, so be sure your store is signed up to take part. ♣



Weekly Tournament Support

Did you know that AEG offers its Stronghold Stores free tournament support for L5R events? That's right: if you are playing in regular events at your store, make sure your tournament organizer knows about the exclusive promo cards available as prize support for your events. The full details are on l5r.com/event-support, but here's a quick overview of the tournament kit, and how to get it.

First, make sure your store is an L5R Stronghold Store. Go to l5r.com and click on "search stores" under the pages menu. Set the filters to your area and run a search. If you don't find your store there, then ask the manager to contact customerservice@alderac.com and sign up. If your store is already a Stronghold Store, but not running regular events (or not getting the available free kit), then

check with your store manager or Tournament Organizer. Either can submit a request for an event kit on www.l5r.com/event-support/.

There are, however, a few requirements of which you should be aware. Event kits must be requested at least 30 days prior to the event date, and requests should not be submitted for events more than 60 days out. I realize this limits the Tournament Organizer to one month's worth of events at a time, but it's necessary to keep the system running smoothly. Finally, AEG can only provide free support for up to four events in a calendar month.

The contents of each event kit include two promo cards; four copies of a prize card, and eight copies of a participation card. The official distribution breakdown is two copies of the prize card for

the winner, one for second place and one copy for the Tournament Organizer. However, AEG understands that all playgroups differ and the actual distribution may vary as determined by the retailer and tournament organizer. Event kits also rotate every quarter (for the most part) so every three months, you'll see new prize and new participation cards. You can check our website for the current cards and which quarter events they support.

That's about it. If you have any further questions on tournament support and how it works, check the website or email customerservice@alderac.com and we'll be happy to answer any of your questions.

Don't miss out on these free cards or any of the other great support AEG has to offer. ♣

Stronghold Store Program

The Celestial Edition Stronghold store program had a simple but effective year. It ended up being focused on the Imperial Gift and the great demand for that set. This was not unexpected and it allowed us to focus on conventions and Kotei and preparing for the 15th Anniversary. Stores still have rewards from the 2009 program coming and an additional list of bonuses for 2010.

The program's goal is to create strong stores and strong player communities. We have certainly seen the effect first hand as top retailers race to get storyline events and reach unheard-of levels added this year. We've seen a lot of new stores contact us through the urging of their players, and we've seen player communities grow at every level in-between.

All that makes this program more exciting than ever. **LEVEL 1** kits shipped in August, Level 10 shipped in September and Levels 8 and 9 shipped in November. To get us back on schedule, we've set the following calendar to help you get ready.

LEVEL 2 is a set of L5R Hantei cards from the upcoming Myth game: where gods battle it out for

control of cities and followers. To stay connected to our roots, we're making promo cards for our fans, but you'll only be able to get them if your store belongs to the Stronghold Store program.

LEVEL 3 is a discount towards a retailer pre-release kit. While we haven't been able to organize a pre-release for the last set, or for Harbinger (release day promos have already shipped to Stronghold Stores) we intend to bring back the pre-release kit for the expansion after that.

LEVEL 4 is a rare pack specifically for players. It will be sent to stores directly in May to distribute to their member players.

LEVEL 5 is in process now. A new Celestial Edition singles binder has been designed and should be in production by the time you read this. Each store Level 5 or higher will receive not only the binder, but also several rare cards to get it started.

LEVEL 6 is an L5R event kit planned for July, 2010

LEVEL 7 is the Mega-Game global event set for March, 2010. So get your stores ready now and make sure your store is Level 7 by the time we begin shipping.

Stronghold Stores

LEVEL 7+ STORES*

Level 7+ stores will enjoy an exclusive megagame Global Storyline Tournament option during the CE 15 Launch GST.

ACME GAMES	Cincinnati, OH
AUGUSTA BOOK EXCHANGE	Augusta, GA
BULLE2JEUX	Limoges (FR)
CAPUA HOBBIES	Gijon (ES)
GAME PRESERVE III	Bloomington, IN
GAMES TWO DIE FOR	Indianapolis, IN
GUARDIAN GAMES	Portland, OR
HOBBY HANGOUT	Douglasville, GA
NEUTRAL GROUNDS	San Juan (PH)
OUTER PLANES	Santa Rosa, CA
PATRIOT GAMES	Huddersfield (GB)
PORTAL	Moscow (RU)
ROLE GAMES	Marseille (FR)
THE GAME CASTLE	Londonderry, NH
THE GAMES SHOP	Aldershot (GB)
THE TOWER GAMES	Lawrenceville, GA
TSS	Laguna Hills, CA
WAYNE'S WORLD	Anchorage, AK
WHO'S ON 1ST GAMES & COLLECTIBLES	Dublin, CA
Y2KOMICS	Fort Worth, TX

LEVEL 10+ STORES*

In addition to their level 7 participation, Level 10+ stores will participate in limited storyline tournament.

ALIANZA	Santiago (CL)
ALTERNATE REALITIES	Stillwater, OK
COMIC WARRIORS	Annerley (AU)
GAME ON!	Puyallup, WA
GOTHAM COMIC MALLORCA	Palma de Mallorca (ES)
ILLUSIONS GAME STORE	Salisbury, MD
KAISSA MONOKEROS	Athens (GR)
L'ANTRE DES DRAGONS	Bordeaux (FR)
LIBRERIA GIGAMESH	Barcelona (ES)
PATRIOT GAMES	Sheffield (GB)
ROCAMBOLE	Lille (FR)
VISIONS CARDS & GAMES	Montgomery, AL

LEVEL 15+ STORES*

In addition to their Level 7 & Level 10 events, Level 15+ stores will receive their own unique storyline event.

GNOME GAMES TOURNAMENT CENTER	Green Bay, WI
LEGENDES D'AUTRES MONDES	Bourgoin-Jallieu (FR)
PADIS	Madrid (ES)
TROLL2JEUX	Paris (FR)
ULTRA COMIX	Nurnberg (DE)
UNIVERS PARALLELE	Toulouse (FR)
WAR DOGS GAME CENTER	Jacksonville, FL

*as of press time

AEG Wants Your L5R Memories!

Have you played L5R for 15 years? 10 years? 1 year? AEG wants your best memories and photographs from your time with L5R. We're working on a special project and would like to include as much of the fan's input as possible. After all, you made the game a success, and there are thousands and thousands of great stories out there.

We're looking for anything, be it stories from events, the effort you put into making a costume, or the strange trip to GenCon that one year. Photos are definitely wanted and needed as well: everything from your local L5R gaming group to great shots from the big events.

Please send what you have to customerservice@alderac.com no later than March 31, 2010. Or you can mail copies to:

Alderac Entertainment Group
15 Years of L5R
4045 E Guasti Rd, Ste 210
Ontario, CA 91761

Thank you and we look forward to seeing you look back!

THE HARBINGER

DUNCAN MACPHAIL'S & GAËL SCHMIDT-CLÉACH

The Harbinger L5R CCG expansion features the Dragon, Mantis, and Phoenix Clans, who each receive a new stronghold with this set. New strongholds give the loyal players of a faction a chance to try out new strategies and experience game play from a fresh perspective. Let's look at the new options presented with this release.

Dragon's Last Step Castle represents an interesting departure from past strongholds. It features a versatile action used to protect your provinces, gain honor, and even re-honor your personalities, though you need to hold off your opponent's attacks in order to do it. Dragons have both kensai and magistrates with high chi to get the most benefit out of this action, though the magistrates (such as Kitsuki Yodo) are best at gaining honor. Perhaps the Dragon Clan will adopt a courtly, honor-based strategy to honor their Empress. While this is the build we expect to see, I wonder if any clever Dragon players will find another use for this stronghold, such as a military deck that relies on the high province strength so it can attack all-out every turn.

Mirumoto Shiki is a new personality for the Dragon Clan: a powerful Imperial Magistrate. He possesses a new honor-gaining trait which reads "After an action destroys an enemy card at the current battlefield, if Mirumoto Shiki is there: Gain 1 Honor, or 2 Honor if the card was dishonorable before it was destroyed." He also has a ranged attack, which can hone in on the dishonorable (a trick he may have learned from watching Mantis magistrates in action).

The Mantis' Thunder Dragon Bay gives them the strength of thunder. As you can see, the stronghold itself is a thunder card with an action, so you can get a modest force bonus every turn. The force bonus compensates for the lower force of most Shugenja, allowing them to compete with the Samurai for military superiority. The majority of thunder actions come from spells, making this a stronghold for the Mantis Shugenja; fortunately, they have two Shugenja families, the Moshi and the Kitsune, to give them plenty of choices. While a deck of Kitsune scouts may be more at home in one of their older strongholds, those scouts can also serve as a supporting theme for a thunder deck, giving Mantis excellent access to two powerful subsets of cards.

To get the most out of the stronghold, you want to take plenty of thunder actions. The new sensei, Moshi Sayoko, provides an excellent way to do so: his battle action allows you to take two additional, consecutive battle actions. Since



she is a thunder Shugenja, the action has the thunder keyword as well, triggering the stronghold's trait. Watch out if she receives naval!

Phoenix's Twin Soul Temple also departs from the past stronghold design. It exemplifies a new option for Phoenix Samurai supported by a few Shugenja. Strongholds with battle actions that destroy enemy cards are often worth the high costs such as discarding a card or destroying your own personality. The cost of this action is the constraint it places on deck building by requiring Samurai personalities. How many Phoenix will follow this new and more militant direction?

Masakazu makes his appearance as an experienced personality. He is something of a strange fit with the Phoenix Clan. As a high force bruiser in a faction that doesn't normally rely on Force, he possesses a natural outlet in Twin Soul Temple. His own formidable battle action bows one enemy unit, allowing him to destroy most targets easily while using Twin Soul Temple. There are only two other human characters in Celestial Edition with as much force as Masakazu, and both are Clan Champions! He truly earns his title of bully.

These new options will change the face of the battlefield. What deck will you play?



fans when he first appeared, but playtesting found his lack of Cavalry more balanced than many players thought. Search for Survivors, a Scout action geared mainly towards Crab, had to be powered down a little during playtest, but survived the process mostly unscathed. Of course, many more cards appeared as a result of the 2009 Kotei

NUTS & BOLTS

The Harbinger features 166 new cards, including new Strongholds for the Dragon, Mantis, and Phoenix Clans. Everyone from storyline buffs to hardcore tournament players has something to be excited about in this new set, so let's take a peek at what may await in your first booster pack next month.

Last Kotei season was a first in L5R history, with each tournament ending with the creation of a card based on the winning player's faction. Pre-playtest version of those cards were posted on AEG's website for all to see. About half of those cards were printed in The Harbinger, with the other half waiting for the next set to see the light of day.

Some of those cards managed to make it through playtest with few to no changes, like Utaku Tairu, a Unicorn Clan boxable with reasonable stats and the Tactician keyword (though lacking Cavalry). Tairu caused quite a stir among

season, making The Harbinger a golden opportunity for players to understand what goes on behind the scenes during the creation of a set.

The Harbinger also brings us two new Celestials, the newest card type from Path of the Destroyer. This new set puts a twist on it, though, as Emma-O's Guidance departs from the Clan-specific Celestials of Path of the Destroyer, and can be used by all Clans with no restriction. (After all, Emma-O, the Fortune of Death, does not favor any Clan over the others.) You can expect more such Celestials in the future.

If the second Celestial is best suited for Spider Clan players (using it should lead to massive Honor losses), it also has little in common with the Kami featured in Path of the Destroyer. With the printing of The Wrath of Kali-Ma, the Spider Clan now has a choice: either protect the Empire along the other Great Clans, or side with

the force behind the invasion of Rokugan by the Destroyers. And believe me, Kali-Ma (who appears here as an L5R card for the first time), knows how to rally people to her side.

This new set also contains a number of gems for storyline lovers. Having spent years in hiding as a Ronin, fan favorite Tamago finally makes his return in The Harbinger. And let me tell you, the wait was well worth it! Tamago has been busy amassing an army of Ronin with the help of his lover Utagawa, and if their purpose is still unknown, Tamago himself has forgotten nothing of his former life as Matsu Nimuro, Champion of the Lion Clan.

Spider Clan players will also be happy to learn that Daigotsu Yuhmi returns in The Harbinger. While not as venerable a character as Tamago, Yuhmi captured the imagination of Spider players everywhere with his first appearance in fiction, and the interest only grew as the Story Team repeatedly hinted at a dark secret behind his very existence. The Harbinger finally reveals that secret, and while I don't want to spoil anything, let me just say that it involves a surprisingly close link between Yuhmi and his lord Daigotsu, as well as the dealings of the Goblin known as Omoni.

Finally, The Harbinger doesn't disappoint tournament players either. The set sees the return of an old favorite in a more balanced form. Enticement makes for a nice spiritual heir to Kolat Master, and should see a large amount of play. (It also combos nicely with Emma-O's Guidance, by the way). Combo players will be happy to know that Enlightenment decks also receive new toys to play with, such as Knowing From Within, which provides additional card draw and might help put Enlightenment back on the map as a competitive deck.

Of course, there is more to The Harbinger than these few cards. More previews are available online, and if you want to know more about the new Strongholds, check out Duncan's article in this very magazine. The set will hit stores shortly; once it does, it's up to you to find the best way to use all those pretty new cards. ❀

Harbinger Storyline Update

The history of the Emerald Empire is rife with challenges that threatened to overwhelm it at every instance, but Rokugan has persevered throughout. Now, however, it confronts an alliance of foes that seem greater than all that have come before. Many wonder — with a land and a people fatigued from constant conflict — whether attrition and mounting casualties will finally overcome the defenses of the Emerald Empire.

The most pressing threat presently facing the Empire is the inexorable advance of the Destroyer Horde in the southern provinces. Despite the coordinated defensive efforts of the Crab, Lion, and Unicorn clans, the Destroyers continue to advance, pressing through the southern Crab provinces and threatening to spill forward into the Scorpion lands beyond. In every exchange the clans exact a terrible price, but their enemies' ranks seem without limit. The finest Hiruma and Shinjo scouts report that the Destroyers number not in the thousands or tens of thousands, but hundreds of thousands. How such a force could exist in the mortal world baffles all attempts to decipher it: the lords of war Hida Benjio, Akodo Shigetoshi, and Utaku Yu Pan know only that they face a foe that can fight for months or even years without threat of exhaustion.

The plague that has troubled the Empire continues to spread without explanation. Remote villages with little contact with the outside world inexplicably succumb to the illness and are decimated. Major urban centers collapse beneath the burden of the sick and dying. The Empress tasks the Phoenix Clan to discover all they can about the nature of the illness, and how it can be combated. From the confines of the sacred Twin Soul Temple, the Isawa and their brothers among the Shiba vow to protect the Empire from this insidious threat.

The Empress' staunchest supporters, the Dragon, continue to endure the punishment of a former kinsman. Having thinned the ranks of his enslaved Yobanin forces, the Dark Oracle of Fire Tamori Chosai now assaults the Dragon mountains with a more experienced, deadlier Army of Fire. No longer mindlessly sacrificing his forces

to mask the approach of his allies in the south, Chosai instead orders precise strikes against the Ox, the Badger, the Phoenix, and especially the Dragon, preventing their participation in the war in the south with anything more than the most token of forces. Enraged that a former member of her clan continues to threaten not only the Dragon but the Empire as a whole, the Dragon Champion Mirumoto Kei vows to see the Army of Fire destroyed and every trace of its existence wiped from the face of Rokugan forever.

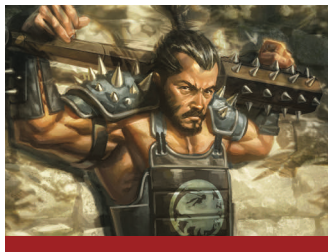
In the Islands of Silk and Spice, the Empress holds her Winter Court free of the plague, so that her attendants might live unencumbered by its threat and serve her without distraction. The Mantis Clan protects the court and its purity, ruthlessly turning away even the most desperate refugees seeking freedom from war and plague. The clan's secret protection of the

Thunder Dragon ends as the vastly powerful creature finally recovers its true measure, and now exists hidden within Thunder Dragon Bay. With the dragon secure, the Mantis turn their efforts to the war in the mainland, eager to prove their worth against the Empire's enemies. The Yobanjin movements in the north are forced to steer well clear of the coastline, for the Mantis wait there to harry and destroy them wherever they appear. Likewise the Sea of Shadows in the south remains a closed avenue for the Destroyer Horde, as the Mantis fleets stand ready to destroy all that threaten the seas beyond. And in secret, within the confines of Kyuden Gotei, those few gaijin who serve the Mantis stand before the Empress at her request, that they might offer whatever insights they possess as to the nature of the Destroyers' true capabilities.

While the Great Clans struggle to maintain order, other forces with

in the Empire are on the move as well. Having grown well past their titular number, the Legion of Two Thousand mobilizes throughout the south-central provinces of Rokugan, preparing to reinforce the front line should it fall back any further. The brilliance of the ronin called Tamago, together with the insight of his lover Utagawa and the talents of the many exceptional individuals flocking to their banner, present an entirely different aspect of the Empire that the Destroyers must overcome if they hope to gain final victory. Tamago's sole concern lies in fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Lion Champion, Akodo Shigetoshi: the only man in the Empire who knows his true identity.

And in the mountains north of Rokugan, far from the renewed battle with the Army of Fire, the ancient temples known as the Fingers of Bone house the leadership of the Spider Clan and their many secrets. Daigotsu conceals himself within, struggling to understand the enormity of the burden that has been placed upon his shoulder: a burden the Empire does not yet suspect but which will shake it to its core if it were to be revealed. As if this burden were not enough, somewhere nearby the Dark Lord senses the harbinger of his true foe: the priestess of Kali-Ma, the Ebon Daughter. ❀



The Plague War...and How You Can Fight It!



Rokugan is facing its first Empire-wide threat since the Divine Empress took the throne. In the south, strange four-armed beings known as the Destroyers have joined with familiar Shadowlands threats to tear down the Great Wall of Kaiu and pour into the breach. The Army of Dark Fire continues to harass the northern clans, bringing deadly new tactics after its previous failure to reach Toshi Ranbo. All over the Empire, tainted air carries the plague, creating mindless zombies who carry the disease to new victims. Already, whole provinces have been put to the torch in an effort to combat the plague, with the loss of the entire Horiuchi family one of the first casualties. At the heart of all of this, Kali-Ma stretches her arms to blot out the Empire.

In such times of darkness, the soul of bushido burns brightest.

As we begin 2010, AEG presents a new megagame — **The Empire's Glory** — in which individual clans and Rokugan as a whole both face daunting challenges. During the course of the megagame, the clans will have opportunities to win Glory and Honor. Glory can be won in card tournaments such as GenCon, the European Championships, and the Kotei events. Honor can be won in side events and non-card contests, such as Winter Court, costume contests, charity events, and koku drives.

DANGER FOR THE CLANS

Each clan faces a major military threat from one of Jigoku's minions, such as the Ebon Daughter or the Dark Oracle of Fire. Also, each clan faces the problem of plague in their lands. At the end of the year, the megagame will come to its conclusion, and the points each clan has accumulated will be compared to the total possible points of that type available. If a clan has enough of the total Glory points, it will defeat its challenge. Similarly, if the clan has enough of the total Honor points, it will wipe out the plague in its lands. Every clan has a target it must reach. If a clan falls significantly below its target, the effects of losing will be especially devastating. On the other hand, if a clan is significantly higher than its target, there will be extra rewards for that clan within the story, putting it in a strong position at the start of the next story arc. The targets for each clan winning are based on the current membership within the Imperial Assembly, and will be posted on the website shortly before the first Kotei. At certain times, clans will receive the opportunity to aid other clans — so be on the lookout for the chance to aid your fellow samurai!

DANGER FOR THE EMPIRE

Not only do the clans face individual dangers and challenges, Rokugan as a whole also faces great threats. Many times when a clan earns Glory or Honor points, the clan will face a decision: keep those points or devote them to the greater good of the Empire? At the end of the megagame, Rokugan as a whole must have enough Glory points to defeat Kali-Ma. Likewise, Rokugan must have enough of all Honor points to find a cure for the plague. If the players in the various clans do not give enough to the Empire, Jigoku will win!

When Rokugan's fate has been determined, the Divine Empress will give special recognition to the clans who sacrificed the most for the Empire. To the clan who do-

nates the most Glory points, the Empress will grant a regiment of her most highly trained imperial troops, who will now serve in their traditional duties as vassals of the clan. Similarly, the clan who donates the most Honor points will foster an imperial heir, raising the child in their lands and teaching him or her their special skills and traditions.

THE SPIDER'S POISON

The Spider clan faces a special choice during the megagame. The minions of Jigoku have never been united, but like the recognized great clans they face the dual threats of plague and military conquest. However, even with the setback of the Empress's knowl-

edge of their true nature, the Spider stand at a critical point in their plans. They will either succeed in their plot to infiltrate the Empire, or they will be cast out and abandon the experiment of the "Spider clan" altogether.

When a Spider player wins Glory or Honor points for the clan and has the opportunity to devote those points to the Empire, the

player may instead devote those points to Jigoku. When determining the final percentages to find out who won or lost, the clans and the Empire will sorely regret the loss of those points!

If the Spider clan as a whole devotes more Glory and Honor points (combined) to Jigoku than they do to Rokugan, then the Spider clan will cease to exist, and future arcs will see the forces of darkness return to their old strategies as the Shadowlands Horde. If, instead, the Spider clan as a whole devotes more combined points to Rokugan than Jigoku, they will force the Empress to recognize them as a great clan with official standing, lands, and duties — putting them in a position to cause a great deal of harm to the Empire in the future. Thus, the Spider's choice is simple: attack the Empire from the outside, or poison it from within?

No matter what the result of that choice is, the Spider still face the same challenges and potential prizes as the other clans — even if this leads to the Spider fostering the future heir!

THE KOTEI SEASON

Beginning with the start of the Kotei season, players will have another means of affecting the course of the Plague War. On the website, there will be a map showing the provinces of Rokugan, two special units per clan, and various threats and challenges facing the Empire. Every week, all Assembly members will be able to log in to the Imperial Assembly web site (<http://www.l5r.com/imperial-assembly/>) and vote on the actions of the clan's units. These actions can include a wide range of possibilities: fighting Destroyers at the remnants of the Kaiu Wall, containing the plague in a home province, assisting another clan against the Army of Dark Fire, saving one of the Empress's councilors, or simply gathering resources for future fights. Each possible choice comes with its own costs and rewards, shown on the map and in the options. Every week each clan will gain Strategic points, and every choice will have a cost in Strategic points. Some threats will be minor, requiring few Strategic points to conquer but yielding few Glory or Honor points in return. Others will be more substantial, requiring a lot of resources but yielding great rewards in Glory or Honor for your clan or the Empire. When left unchecked, some will grow over time, as plague spreads and Rokugan's enemies ravage the land. Others will disappear, with the opportunities for Glory and Honor lost and the desolation adding to Jigoku's victories!

At the Kotei events, clans will be awarded additional Strategic points based on participation.

Glory will be awarded to the top four players in the tournament, and Honor will be awarded to the top four winners of whatever side event that Kotei is hosting. The tournament winner will have the opportunity to choose a character from the clan who will appear in a story telling how the glory was won. Both the top tournament winner and the top side event winner will face a choice: keep the

Honor or Glory for the clan, give the Honor or Glory to one of two clans revealed at the start of the

the Glory or Honor, the full points are counted for the clan they represented. If they choose to give the

As darkness looms, the fate of the Empire is on your shoulders. Will you serve?

Kotei, or give it to Rokugan. (Or, if Spider wins, possibly give it to Jigoku instead.) If the players keep

points away — whether to one of the two clans named at the start of the Kotei, or to the Empire (or Jigoku) — then the clan will receive half the value in Strategic points. Due to the fog of war, points won at a Kotei will be available for the winning clan to use one week later. After the Kotei season is over, the votes will become monthly rather than weekly, until the final resolution of the megagame.

As darkness looms, the fate of the Empire is on your shoulders. Will you serve? ☘



Kotei Storyline Update

If the state of the Emerald Empire during the events depicted in the Harbinger expansion was dire, then surely Rokugan's condition during the events of the 2010 Kotei Season could be described as disastrous. The Empire remains trapped in a deadly pincer attack by two nightmarish foes, either one of which could pose a significant threat to the Empire's security. The Destroyer Horde in the south — a hideous and alien army serving a fiendish demon of incredible power — continues to push ever northward, its ranks seemingly inexhaustible despite the valiant efforts of the Crab, Lion and Unicorn. In the north, the vastly smaller but considerably more dangerous Army of Fire continues its lightning-fast raids against major Dragon holdings, stealing supplies and leaving death in its wake. The hatred between the Dark Oracle of Fire and the Dragon Champion is without measure, and they have each vowed to destroy the other.

Meanwhile, the plague has crippled the Empire's interior, disrupting shipping lanes and laying waste to entire towns as it spreads inexplicably across the face of Rokugan. The Kotei story is the story of a nation at war. Only one year ago, the Empire was gripped in the throes of the War of Dark Fire, a war that was at the time completely unprecedented, but which the Divine Empress and

her subjects now understand served as a feint to draw their attention away from the Destroyer Horde massing in the south. The final words of Lord Sun, "the fire is a lie," failed to save the Empire. Likewise the final warning of Lady Moon, a caution to build a wall in the north, was assumed by her descendants to be some form of metaphor or euphemism, and it too went unheeded... much to the Empire's dismay.

In this time of war, the samurai of Rokugan will be tested. Although they do not know it, fifteen challenges await them: fifteen events or individuals of incredible power that will threaten their very way of life. If they are not overcome, ruination lurks in the wings. The master of the Destroyer Horde and her lieutenants stand among the challenges, but they are not alone. Others lurk within the shadows, hidden from the light of day and waiting for their chance to strike. Already the Kuni witch-hunters of the Crab Clan hunt the mysterious Ebon Daughter, but she is but one of the many hidden threats awaiting the Empire.

Now the greatest heroes and generals of the Great Clans must rise and defend their home from insidious threats that might destroy it. Legends will fall in battle, and new legends will rise in their place to lead the clans in this most desperate of times. Among

the Divine Empress' greatest heroes are:

- **HIDA BENJIRO**, the rikugun-shokan of the Crab armies and the merciless sword arm of the Crab Champion.

- **KAKITA NORITOSHI**, the greatest duelist in Rokugan, committed to the destruction of Emerald Champion, though not at the expense of the Emerald Empire.

- **MIRUMOTO KEI**, the first truly mortal Dragon Clan Champion and a woman who has made the study of war her entire life.

- **AKODO SHIGETOSHI**, the brilliant Lion Clan Champion and the greatest tactician that the Empire has known in generations.

- **YORITOMO NAIZEN**, the Scourge of Storms and Scion of the Thunder Dragon, who has vowed to stand against a threat that only he understands at the expense of all else.

- **ISAWA OCHIAI**, the Lady of the Phoenix and Master of Fire, one of the most powerful shugenja in all the Empire, who longs for a way to save lives rather than take them.

- **SHOSURO JIMEN**, the utterly ruthless and amoral Emerald Champion whose sleeping rage is at long last stoked to a fever pitch at the extended as-

sault by gaijin on his beloved Rokugan.

- **UTAKU YU PAN**, the Khan's hand-picked commander of the Unicorn forces in the south, divided between locating the hidden lord Daigotsu and defending Rokugan against the forces of the monstrous Kali-Ma.

- And of course, the **DARK LORD HIMSELF**, **DAIGOTSU**, master of the Spider Clan. Bolstered by the lore of the Jackals from the Burning Sands and burdened by a secret that he and he alone can bear, the Dark Lord seeks the destruction of Kali-Ma, that the Empire might persevere for his beloved son to rule in his name one distant day.

The members of the L5R CCG community will step into the shoes of these great men and women this Kotei season, guiding the actions of the Great Clans throughout the duration of the conflict. What threats will take the greatest priority? Will the clans value their own Honor and Glory over those of the Empire, or will they sacrifice all to ensure that Rokugan survives? What role will the hated Spider play in the war between the Empress and the Destroyer? Will an Empire united stand victorious, or will an Empire divided fall to ruin? The war begins in March. ☘

Kotei 2010 Event Dates

NORTH AMERICA	
LaFayette, LA	Mar 6
Feeding Hills, MA	Mar 6
Irvine, CA	Mar 13
Tulsa, OK	Mar 13
Tacoma, WA	Mar 13-14
Kansas City, KS	Mar 20
Las Vegas, NV	Mar 27
Rockville, MD	Mar 27
Ottawa, Canada	Apr 3
Calgary, Canada	Apr 3
Saskatoon, Canada	Apr 4
Green Bay, WI	Apr 10
Columbia, SC	Apr 10
Cincinnati, OH	Apr 17
Winter Park, FL	Apr 17
Grove City, PA	Apr 24
South Sioux City, NE	Apr 24
Live Oak, TX	Apr 24
Dublin, CA	May 1
St Paul, MN	May 8
Carolina, Puerto Rico	May 15
Montgomery, AL	May 22
Abbotsford, BC Canada	May 22
Denver, CO	May 29
Collinsville, IL	Jun 5
Salt Lake City, UT	Jun 12
Anchorage, AK	Jun 13
Chicago, IL	Jun 19
Thunder Bay, Canada	Jun 26
SOUTH AMERICA	
Santiago, Chile	Mar 20
São Paulo, Brazil	Apr 10
Rosario, Santa Fe, Argentina	May 1
EUROPE	
Madrid, Spain	Mar 6-7
Dublin, Ireland	Mar 13-14
Paris, France	Mar 13-14
Szczecin, Poland	Mar 20-21
Athens, Greece	Mar 27-28
Lille, France	Apr 3-4
Barcelona, Spain	Apr 10-11
Sheffield, UK	Apr 17-18
Karlsruhe, Germany	Apr 17-18
Moscow, Russia	Apr 24-25
Maastricht, Netherlands	Apr 24-25
Santiago, Spain	May 8-9
Prague, Czech Republic	May 15-16
Sverige / Sweden	May 22-23
Aldershot, UK	May 29-30
Grenoble, France	Jun 5-6
Reykjavik, Iceland	Jun 12-13
Nürnberg, Germany	Jun 19-20
Budapest, Hungary	Jun 26-27
PACIFIC RIM & AFRICA	
Adelaide, Australia	Mar 6-7
Pretoria, South Africa	Apr 10-11
Auckland, New Zealand	Apr 11
Brisbane, Australia	Apr 23
Selangor, Malaysia	May 15-16
Alabang, Muntinlupa City, Philippines	Jun 12

All dates and locations are as of press time. Check l5r.com for updates.



4th Edition L5R RPG Preview

BY SHAWN CARMAN

In the second quarter of 2010, AEG will release the fourth edition of its award-winning Legend of the Five Rings Role-playing Game. In many ways, the new edition is a logical progression from the first, second, third, and revised third editions of the game. In other ways, however, it represents a radical departure from previous incarnations. Written over the course of eighteen months and playtested for more than a year, 4th Edition is going to elevate the enjoyment of L5R RPG players everywhere to an entirely different level.

WHAT'S THE SAME?

First and foremost, the core elements of the Roll & Keep system have not changed. The game still utilizes ten-sided dice in a pool of up to ten dice. The character's Traits and Skills determine the number of dice a character rolls to resolve a task, just like in the past... although there are other kinds of rolls as well, including Trait Rolls, Ring Rolls, Spell Casting Rolls, Damage Rolls, and Contested Rolls. Dice can still explode (to the delight of players everywhere) and rolling a ten can easily lend a single die a truly impressive result. The Target Numbers for performing tasks scale upward (typically in increments of five), and players can dramatically increase the effects of their characters' successes by voluntarily increasing the TN using Raises.

Schools remain quite recognizable from their previous incarnations. Bushi and Courtier Schools possess five Techniques, while Shugenja Schools have a single Technique. Characters gain new Techniques as they increase in abilities, as measured by Insight. Additional means of character progression are available in the form of Alternate Paths (previously known as New Paths) and Advanced Schools.

Most importantly, the essence of the game world hasn't changed. The Legend of the Five Rings Role-playing Game continues to put you in the role of a samurai, a servant pledged to give everything in service to his lord — save his honor. It's about carrying the soul of your grandfather into battle with you and living every day three feet from death, while the spirits of your ancestors watch over you: judging you by your actions and how you venerate their memories.

It's about your honor being more powerful than your steel.

WHAT'S CHANGED?

Judging by the things we've kept in the new edition, one might not think that much is changing. Nothing could be further from the truth. When the new edition was first conceived during the early months of 2008, the complexities of the already existing Third Edition Revised system could not simply be cherry-picked; the various sub-systems simply depended too much upon one another. Certain Techniques affected particular spells, which could impact certain Advantages, which might have ramifications for a particular Kata, and so forth. Furthermore, the intricacies of the rules at that point had filled the RPG forum with arguments between mathematicians rather than people enjoying a good old-fashioned role-playing game. (At this point the author feels compelled to assume full responsibility for all these prob-

lems, since he held a position on the Design Team starting with the release of Creatures of Rokugan, Third Edition.) The long and the short of the matter was that Third Edition, while a good game, had become mired in its own mechanical complexities and was rapidly growing stagnant.

This simply would not do.

From those first days, when only three people were aware that a new edition was being planned, it was obvious that the game did not simply need a refit. In order

to create the ultimate version of Legend of the Five Rings, the system needed to be completely disassembled and rebuilt from the ground up. We needed to evaluate everything from the standpoint of whether or not it benefited the game. There could be no sacred cows. And from this standpoint came the as-yet-unwritten game's first and foremost governing principle: "It must feel like First Edition, with the robust character diversity of Third Edition." But what does that mean?

It means that Fourth Edition is designed to be fast and simple. Its rules are intuitive and relatively quick to learn, without the need to constantly consult the rulebook. Indeed, another principle of its design is that everything a player needs to know about his character should be on his character sheet, with no need for page-flipping during the course of the game. Yet this simplicity, while harkening back to the days of First Edition, should not come at the expense of diversity. First Edition was a glorious game,

Most importantly, the essence of the game world hasn't changed. The Legend of the Five Rings Role-playing Game continues to put you in the role of a samurai, a servant pledged to give everything in service to his lord — save his honor. It's about carrying the soul of your grandfather into battle with you and living every day three feet from death, while the spirits of your ancestors watch over you: judging you by your actions and how you venerate their memories.

but some of its speed and simplicity came in part from its limited number of mechanical facets.

So, back to the question at hand: what has changed in this new edition? The answer is quite a bit! Let's start with some of the major points.

THE TOOLKIT APPROACH

From its most basic concepts, Fourth Edition is a toolkit for GMs to tailor the system to suit their campaign. Every aspect of the game is customizable, with extensive guidelines and sidebars suggesting how core systems can be easily modified to allow for different experiences. Even such fundamental concepts as the number of Wounds a character gains per rank is customizable, with a sidebar explaining the options from the default of Earth x2 per rank (which results in lethal combat that runs from 1 to 3 rounds) up to the inhuman Earth x5 per rank (resulting in veritable juggernauts rampaging through the city streets in an effort to destroy one another).

THE ACTION SYSTEM

One of the most contentious aspects of Third Edition was what could and could not be accomplished as part of a character's turn. The variety of different options a character possessed (Melee Attack, Ranged Attack, Spell Casting, Miscellaneous Complex Action) led to some confusion as to what manner of roll certain Techniques, Skills, or Advantages allowed a character to take. (To say nothing of the confusion regarding how a character moves during his turn!) In order to correct this problem, a system of Action types appeared during the earliest stages of Fourth Edition's design. Now, a character may perform Free Actions, Simple Actions, and Complex Actions as part of his turn during a combat round, with all other mechanics specifically referring back to them.

Free Actions are quick, almost instantaneous things that most characters can do without thinking, such as speaking a few words or moving a short distance. Characters can make as many of these as they wish (barring GM intervention,) but only one of each kind per round. Simple Actions are more complicated but still relatively easy for a trained warrior: dismounting a horse, drawing a medium weapon, or picking up a dropped item, for example. Finally, Complex Actions are reserved for the most involved and elaborate things a character might do during a combat round, including making an attack, casting a spell, or making a Skill Roll. Other mechanics interact with these types as well, such as Techniques in most Bushi Schools that allow characters to make melee attacks as a Simple Action rather than a



Complex Action (and thus allowing the potential for two attacks per round, since a character may make either two Simple Actions or one Complex Action per turn).

A COMPLETE GAME

In all previous editions of the game, the core book has focused on the Great Clans, and that remains true in Fourth Edition. The chapter devoted to character creation includes everything necessary to play a member of the Crab, Crane, Dragon, Lion, Mantis, Phoenix, Scorpion, and Unicorn clans, with all the Skills, Advantages, Disadvantages, Schools, and spells. In previous editions players often had to wait for sourcebooks to detail the additional factions of the game — factions originally introduced in the CCG but which play a vital role in the rich background of Rokugan. This has changed in Fourth Edition. In the optional Advanced Mechanics chapter, one will find the rules necessary to play the ninth Great Clan — the Spider — as well as all the canon Minor Clans that have ever existed throughout the Empire's history, the major sects within the Brotherhood of Shinsei, the major Imperial schools, and a number of ronin organizations.

More than simply reintroducing all the factions, however, Fourth Edition contains all the systems that the game requires as well. Previous editions gradually introduced new mechanical subsystems to the core rules over time, leading to a slowly increasing degree of complexity, problematic balance issues, and the dreaded “power creep” often present in long-running RPGs. To avoid this, all the significant subsystems in Fourth Edition are present within the core rules, including the character creation rules for all the factions described above and the systems for Ancestors, Kata, Kiho, Maho, and the Shadowlands Taint. Additionally, the core rules include systems for Alternate Paths and Advanced Schools: the two principle alternative means for characters to advance in rank outside the confines of their character's Basic School. Two Alternate Paths and one Advanced School are included for each of the Great Clans, dramatically increasing options for character diversity within the core rulebook.

By including all these systems (albeit on an optional basis), we allow future sourcebooks to reference the core rules without using up valuable space on explanatory text. We're also preventing a new player from purchasing the core rules and the latest sourcebook, only to discover that the mechanics introduced in that sourcebook are explained in some other, previously published sourcebook. The only exceptions to this inclusion are the previously existing mechanics of Dojo, Heritage Tables, and Vassal Families. Fortunately,

these are all very simple and can have explanatory text included in any sourcebook which contains them.

THE REBALANCING ACT

With the inclusion of so many different systems in the new edition's core rules, play balance remained a paramount concern for the Design Team. Existing mechanics were not simply ported over, but rather reduced to their basest level and rebuilt from the ground up, much as the core rules were. Every mechanic — whether a Skill, an Advantage, a Technique, or a spell — was broken down and examined to determine its value. What was it trying to accomplish? What was its purpose? Was it redundant with another existing mechanic of its type? Vast numbers of different mechanics were consolidated, discarded, rewritten or introduced. Do the same Advantages that players love still exist? Probably, but they may work entirely differently in order to better meet their purpose. Some old Advantages that haven't been seen in years resurfaced, while some that have been a part of the game since the beginning were re-named or no longer exist. Overlap and excessive consolidation of Skills were corrected, with the additional benefits of Emphases and Mastery Abilities streamlined for simplicity. Every Technique was analyzed to determine if it fit within the School's theme, then either converted to the new rules, rewritten to adhere more closely to the theme, or discarded outright and replaced with a new and more appropriate mechanic. Many schools look outwardly very different from their past forms, but all of them adhere closely to the basic themes of their clans.

Revising the mechanics for the new edition did not simply consist of rewrites, however. In some cases (such as with Spells), mechanics changed elements and Mastery Levels in order to better align with clear elemental themes maintained throughout the rules. The costs of Advantages and Disadvantages were completely thrown out, and new costs were assigned only after the entire slate of options had been properly balanced and completed. Some systems, like Kata, were scrapped and then completely rebuilt in order to make them simpler and more attractive as optional mechanics.

In short, “rebalancing” is a somewhat conservative term for the degree of revision that actually took place in the creation of this new edition.

TIMELINE NEUTRALITY

Perhaps the most significant change to the new edition is that all references to the current timeline have been removed. Playing the



More than simply reintroducing all the factions, however, Fourth Edition contains all the systems that the game requires as well.

L5R RPG has always been about telling unique stories: stories created by GMs and players working in concert with one another. The tools necessary to tell a story based on the current plotlines unfolding in the CCG (which take place in real time), have always been available, and will continue to be available. But should the core rules reflect that storyline, particularly when it will rapidly change and render the book itself out of date? For that matter, won't following this pattern render any timeline-dependant sourcebook out of date relatively quickly? On the other hand, how much additional information is really necessary to play in the current storyline? Players interested in such things usually follow the story anyway, and if given all the tools they require for the task, then they need very little additional aid other than the traditional planning of adventures.

With this in mind, the design of the new edition kept timeline impact to an absolute minimum. There is not a twenty-page year-by-year timeline as in some previous editions. Instead, it contains a general description of the Empire's history on a century-by-century ba-

sis, laying the foundation for any GM who wants to plan a historical campaign, and sowing ideas for GMs who want to create their own unique version of the setting. Obviously it isn't possible to completely remove all influence of the storyline in the game. (For example, throughout most of the Empire's history, the Mantis and Spider are not Great Clans.) With a few minor exceptions, however, the entirety of the book is presented as timeline-neutral, allowing individual groups to take the tools presented in the book and create whatever kind of stories they desire out of it.

One essential aspect of a timeless game entails the presentation of the clans. With so much diversity in their stories over history, a timeless game could conceivably run into difficulty with how to depict them. What were the Crab like during the Clan War versus during the Race for the Throne? What about the Lion during the War against the Lying Darkness versus the reign of the Divine Empress? Perhaps the best thing about the new edition is the opportunity to step outside of specific eras and present the clans in their truest and most essential form: adhering

as closely to their core themes as perhaps they have ever been since their introduction in First Edition.

- **THE CRAB:** the hardest of warriors, who care little for social niceties.
- **THE CRANE:** the elegant and sophisticated masters of court, art, and dueling.
- **THE DRAGON:** enigmatic mystics who stand removed from the Empire.
- **THE LION:** the greatest and most honorable military force in the known world.
- **THE MANTIS:** the ambitious and fearless outsiders who go to any lengths to prove their worth to the Empire.
- **THE PHOENIX:** the brilliant scholars and theologians who study this world and beyond.
- **THE SCORPION:** the sinister masters of secrets and deceit.
- **THE UNICORN:** eternal outsiders and the greatest horsemen in the world.
- And of course **THE SPIDER:** the infiltrators of an Empire, servants of darkness and perhaps the greatest threat Rokugan has ever known. ❀

The Jeweled Champions

A TOURNAMENT SERIES FOR THE L5R CCG

In the Empire of Rokugan, two groups of samurai are exalted above all others. The first are known as the Emperor's Chosen: men and women selected directly by the Emperor or Empress to serve the throne directly, including the Imperial Advisor, the Imperial Chancellor, the Shogun, the Voice of the Emperor, and the Imperial Treasurer. The other such group is the Jeweled Champions: samurai who ascend to the highest levels of society through achievement (typically by succeeding at a great tournament held among the most gifted individuals in the whole of Rokugan).

These individuals include the Emerald Champion, the Jade Champion, the Amethyst Champion, the Ruby Champion, and the Topaz Champion. The Jeweled Champions, while generally less influential than the Emperor's Chosen, hold more esteem in the eyes of the average samurai, for the potential to achieve such a position is something that any individual can dream of.

Among the Jeweled Champions, the Emerald and Jade Champions are lifetime appointments determined by the results of massive tournaments. The Amethyst Championship is likewise a lifetime appointment, although that position is filled at the discretion of the Imperial families, who select the most prominent courtier of a generation. The Ruby Champion is selected by the Emerald Champion from a number of applicants, and serves at his discretion. The Topaz Champion is the most gifted young samurai of a generation, selected at a grueling gempukku tournament and serving for a period of one year.

At least, this is how it has been until now.

The Divine Empress, in her infinite wisdom, recognizes how difficult it must be for samurai to refrain from warring with their enemies. Is it not the duty and nature of a samurai to seek war? In light of this, the Child of Heaven has ordered the Emerald, Jade, Amethyst, and Ruby Champions to hold their respective tournaments on an annual basis: not to replace the Champions, but to give the samurai of the Empire an outlet for their competitive natures and provide opportunities for advancement. Each of the Champions (save the Topaz) will hold a yearly tournament of the sort normally used to fill the position, and the winner of these tournaments will become favored vassals of the Champions. The Jade Champion, for example, will oversee the Jade Championship each year, and the winner shall join the Jade Champion as one of his advisors and agents. In this manner, the Empress fosters positive outlets for inter-clan rivalries and encourages cooperation between the clans.

In addition to these positions, the Empress has created a new position, the Turquoise Champion, based upon her desire to continue sponsoring the sophistication

and refinement so often neglected among the samurai caste. The Turquoise Champion is to be determined on an annual basis in a competition to identify the greatest artisan in the Empire. Once identified, he will have one year to sponsor art and beauty throughout the land in whatever manner is best suited to him, then surrender his title to his successor the following year (although an individual Champion may defend his position in the competition as he sees fit).

As is so often the case, the Lost mirror their pure counterparts in the Empire with tournaments of their own. The insidious Obsidian Champion, greatest warrior and champion of Shourido, and the malevolent Onyx Champion, the most powerful of all the Lost's blood sorcerers, likewise have been commanded by their dark lord Daigotsu to hold an annual tournament. Unlike the Empire, however, the Obsidian and Onyx Champions hold their tournaments to defend their title and retain their position. All among the Lost who hunger for power and influence are free to try and take the positions by force, if they so desire. ❀

